

200
GUERRILLA
WAR



LIT. 101

an anthology
of insurrectionary
fiction!

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OUR MOTTO:
"WE SEEK TO PROMOTE
UNDERSTANDING AND
APPRECIATION OF THE
WORLDS VAST ARRAY OF
PEOPLE AND CULTURES
THROUGH THE DISSEMIN-
ATION OF THE WORLDS
VAST ARRAY OF LITERATURE"

SUB CITY SERIES

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introduction:

THIS ISN'T ABOUT GLORIFYING VIOLENCE. IT'S NOT ABOUT THE RIGHT OR WRONG OF CERTAIN TACTICS, ONLY THE RIGHT TO WIN DIGNITY AND FREEDOM BY ANY MEANS, AND ANY TACTICS NECESSARY. PLUS, IT'S AN EXCITING WAY TO READ ABOUT HISTORY. MOST OF THE PEOPLE WRITING ABOUT IT HERE WERE ALSO MAKING IT!

A.C. 2/03

P.A.:

COVER GRAPHIC IS FROM
THE MOZAMBIQUE FLAG

THE MAU MAU INSURGENCY OF THE 1950'S
PAVED WAY FOR KENYAN INDEPENDENCE IN
1963, AND HASTENED THE INDEPENDENCE OF
OTHER BRITISH COLONIES.

V.S. REID
FROM "THE LEOPARD"

Thirty were in the band which hit the Loman farm before day-break. They slew all in the household and looted it of food, guns and ammunition and vanished into the bush again, and nobody shouted "There they go!" because it was a sweet time for them to strike, when the morning ebb had drained the vigilance from the beleaguered settlers. But the looters found only three rifles.

Now three rifles were not enough to arm the gunless ones, so Nebu, who had joined General Koko's camp just four forays before, went without a rifle. And, puzzled at his constant ill luck, he now ran in the wake of his fellows as they entered the forest behind the farmhouse. Once among the trees, the troop took up the swinging trot which would put some twenty miles behind them by the time the raid was discovered by the morning patrol from Nairobi.

You would have noticed how the unshod black feet fell absolutely only upon those parts of the trail that were hard as stone after the long drought; and how they ran with their elbow devotedly glued to their ribs so as to shed no green leaves from the trees for the sharp-eyed police trackers to see. They ran in a tunnel of safety. They ran into a stream in a splashing commotion that quietened as the long line snaked into the middle, where the water rose to their armpits. Rifles held high above their heads, they breasted downstream for a mile to mystify the police dogs which would soon be nosing forth from the farm. They left the water by swinging up into the limbs of a squat, wide-spreading mango, going over from tree to tree as you cross the roofs in a city, and when they took to earth again they were half a mile away from the stream. A few colobus monkeys woke high in the trees and hugged their neighbors in beady-eyed, teeth-exposed chatter concerning the ghostly line moving along the forest floor underneath, and subsided when they had passed, and that was all. Just a puff of lethal dust that had by pure chance carried over the Loman farm.

holding a gun in his right hand and a glass of wine in the other. He'd tell revolting jokes about the Arab dead who were left out in the open in their black clothes with no one to bury them. . . . We're tough, the officer would say, surrounded by Senegalese and Circassian soldiers who spoke pidgin French and talked about heroism and civilization and women.

—What's the difference between a priest and a cop, Father?

The church was a ship, but the helm was smashed. The church wouldn't sink. And, upstairs, lived two aged priests with their memories and sorrows.

—Why are those who love Western civilization being defeated?

But *we* were looking for the sea.

The church has become a support position. Grinov shots reverberating in the air, Jaber's machine-gun lying silent then bursting forth. Rubble all around. And with us, Father Marcel, his companion and memories of France.

—How will you say mass, Father!

—It'll be a silent mass, he answers me. Amid such cacophony, we seek out silence. We want silence to reign once again. Silence alone is the key to contemplation.

Sameer was talking and telling jokes non-stop, Butros humming his tune, and Talal thinking about his new film. The guns wouldn't hush.

—That's not true. That's the way Communists talk. No, my son, we didn't take anything. We lost our best men to the cause of our civilizing mission. Then we left of our own good will.

—I don't believe you left of your own good will. You left because you were forced to.

Father Marcel wearies of the ideological discussion. He doesn't like ideology. Ideology is the instrument of the age of materialism to ensnare young people. It inevitably leads to people's enslavement to materialism. So they become fanatical and closed to discussion.

—You were a lieutenant in the French army when it entered our country, Father. So you must have taken part in the battle of Maysaloun.*

—Maysaloun, no, I didn't take part in it. I took part in many other battles. In the battles for the Jabal Druze and Ghawtah, outside Damascus. And I recall that we were models of chivalry and discipline, and harmed no one.

—But Father, the massacres and excesses of the battles of Ghawtah and the Jabal are well known. I've read General Andrea's book about these battles. He writes with delight about the occupation, and the expulsion of the Druze, and the killing of the rebel groups in Ghawtah.

—General Andrea? He was my friend. Poor General Andrea, he was earnest and romantic, his entire ambition was to become a marshal in the French army, but he died of a heart attack. Poor Andrea. Listen carefully. (Here, the priest's tone sharpened.) War is war. You can't fight your enemies, you can't stop terrorists and spies and the enemies of civilization without killing some of them. The fate of civilization was at stake. The fate of French history hung on the outcome of the Jabal and Ghawtah battles. Lenny was out of the question. Things had to be quick and sharp.

—What's the difference between a priest and a cop, Father Andrea? He'd be wearing a French officer's uniform,

Now Nebu thought and thought on his bad luck and found nothing to justify it. For in the troop he had played his part well, silencing a stubborn black servant with a thrust of his spear and providing cover for those whom Koko had chosen to perform the beautiful thing on the settler, his wife and whip-wielding overseer. But when afterwards they searched the house, only three rifles and many bullets.

Oh, it took only a mile to want, but it took ten miles to obtain. A man could in his green time gather a nutful of needs in the crown of his head and force them crosswise and downwards through his body until he grew heavy with it, but nothing would come until the time was ripe. Yet it was true that a man needed a rifle to fight the pink-cheek soldiers.

All of them possessed all sorts of wonderful weapons to stay out of sight and pick you off with ease. If you got close enough up to them, then it could be the duty of your knife. Some Kikuyus who had done this splendid thing spoke of how beautiful the white men became when they saw the panga purse its mouth to kiss their throats. But it was only at a great sacrifice that you could get up close.

At a sign from Koko, who was leading, they sank softly. Elephant grass grew thickly in that clearing up ahead, a fine place for an ambush. With eyes and noses and ears, they peeled back every root of the clearing and rose only when they had proved it innocent of enemies: this was when, at Koko's signal, Nebu sent two swift arrows into the grass from his wanderobo bow. A flight of plovers lifted from the grass, but it was the time for plovers to fly and so nobody had the gut-shrink. Yet they were wary when they rose, for the English had become good bushmen since the Emergency and were hitting them with their own tactics often.

In bone and flesh Nebu felt sound, but the rebuff to his spirit by the elusive rifle was real as an aching cavity. Each time that they broke camp and headed south for their old Kikuyu land, it had seemed to him the Great One would relent and give to him what his shoulders and his fingers craved: the wood and iron of a rifle built to snuggle into your shoulder and to curl your fingers around and gently squeeze. But it was not to be.

THE IRA HAS BEEN FIGHTING SINCE 1919 TO
UNITE IRELAND AND END ALL BRITISH OCCU-
PATION OF THE TERRITORY. SINN FEIN IS
THE POLITICAL WING OF THE IRA, AND
GERRY ADAMS, THE PRESIDENT OF SINN FEIN.

GERRY ADAMS
FROM "THE STREET"

THE WHITEROCK ROAD was pitch black and the
occasional young couple, hurrying home, clung their
way past McCrory Park.

A few stragglers leaned together outside Jim's Cafe. An
overcrowded black taxi labored up the hill. Few people no-
ticed the two figures walking down towards the Falls Road.
One was a thickset man in black overcoat, white open-necked
shirt and white drill trousers. He wore a cap pushed back on
his head, and walked with one hand in his pocket. He didn't
seem to be in any hurry. His companion, a younger man
dressed in jeans and an anorak, had to shorten his natural
stride to match the older man's. They walked in silence along-
side the cemetery wall until they reached the Falls Road. They
turned right at the bottom of the Whiterock and strolled slowly
up the road. The young man cleared his throat. His companion
glanced at him.

"Come on, we'll cut down here."

The younger man nodded. They hurried down Milltown
Row and went more cautiously *then, the older man in front*
bent forward with one hand still in his pocket. Down and over
the football pitch, across the Bog Meadows and up towards
the graveyard.

—As you can see, Father, we're not the only ones
here. There are lots of fighters. Aside from that, the church
was almost destroyed when we entered it. And you know
that we had to take it: it's a strategic location, and besides
the enemy used it to fire on us.

We sat and drank around a small table spread with
the cheese and the wine. The other priest sat next to us,
eating and drinking, taking no notice of us. I think he was
looking at us from under his half-shut eyes with hatred and
resentment.

Father Marcel began telling us his story: I came to
Lebanon, he said, after World War I. I was a lieutenant in
the French army. Then I got to know this country and fell
in love with it. I loved two things about it: the commerce
and the openness to the West. This is an amazing country,
and its people are amazing. I wanted to stay so I did. As to
how I became a priest, that's an interesting story. I be-
lieved, like all French soldiers, that we were the bearers of
a civilizing mission to the oppressed peoples of the Orient.
We came here full of dreams. We were coming to the exotic
East. To the land of Lamartine, which we were going to
rescue from serfdom. Then, after the battles the French
army was forced to fight in these lands, I found that the only
way to people's hearts was not by the sword but through cul-
ture. If they studied in our schools, they'd learn our lan-
guage, would strengthen their economic ties with us and
learn about civilization. At first, I wanted to be a teacher in
one of the Catholic schools. The teaching led me to God.
You see, I came to religion by way of civilization and not,
as is usual with you, civilization being introduced to your
countries by way of religion.

Talal blew the smoke from his cigarette into the air,
his big eyes looking skeptically at the priest. But Father, you
didn't introduce civilization into our countries. You're just
colonizers, coming in with the ten commandments. Giving
us the commandments and taking the land.

church, it is common both to you and to the Eastern Christians?

—Naturally, my son. It's an old concept. It was established long before the schisms and the religious wars. The church is a ship and the world a rough sea. No two people disagree over that.

—Then, what is the difference? Talal asked.

—That's a very complicated story. But I can tell you that, in principle, the difference has to do with the fundamental view of the relationship between religion and life. We are practical, rational people. For us, religion regulates the relationship between God and life, it is rational and organized, it orders things. But Eastern Christians, now they're mystics. In the past, they didn't understand the relationship between religion and the state and now they've become a cover for Communism and atheism.

Father Marcel resumed his tour. He was bowed with grief. His face blended with the church's empty space, empty but for the debris and the remnants of the altar. As he walked, the sound of his footsteps striking the floor grew louder, and straw and the bits and pieces of shells flew about the bottom of his brown robe. The thin sun, tinted by the church's stained glass, reflected its colors on the undulating robe.

Let's go up now, Father Marcel said. Let's drink to my friendship for the *fedayeen*.

Father Marcel opened the bottle of wine like a professional soldier. He filled the glasses and drank to our new friendship. He was happy as a child with the wine but he drank like a soldier.

—Why did you do this to the church? This is no ordinary church. It's a cathedral. Do you know what a cathedral is?

I shrugged my shoulders.

—A cathedral is the central church. The big church. Everyone's church. And yet you went and destroyed it.

The moon peeked out at them from behind clouds. Cars on the motorway below sped by unknowing and uncaring. The man with the cap was out of breath by the time they reached the hedge at Milltown Cemetery. The cemetery waited on them, rows and rows of serried tombstones reflecting the cold moonlight. It was desperately quiet. Even the sounds from the motorway and the road seemed cut off, subdued. They forced their way through the hedge and on to the tarmac pathway. Nothing stirred. They waited a few tense seconds and then moved off, silently, a little apart, the young man in the rear, the man with the cap in front. It was twenty past eleven.

The young man's heart thumped heavily against his ribs. He was glad he wasn't alone, though he wished the older man hadn't worn the white trousers. They wouldn't be long now anyway. Ahead of them lay their destination. As the moon came from behind a cloud he could see the pathway stretching before him. His companion cut across a grassy bank and the young man, relaxing a little by now, continued on alone for the last few yards.

He thought of the morning when they had last been there, the funeral winding its way down from the White Rock, the people crossing themselves as it passed, the guard of honor awkward but solemn around the hearse. He thought of the people who had crowded around the graveside. Men and women long used to hardship but still shocked at the suddenness of death. Young people and old people. Friends of the family, neighbors and comrades of the deceased. United in their grief. And in their anger too, he reflected.

He sighed softly, almost inaudibly, to himself as he came alongside his companion again. The older man whispered to him. Wreaths lay on the grave which had been dug that morning and the fresh clay glistened where the diggers had shaped it into a ridge. The two men glanced at each other and then, silently, they stood abreast of the grave.

They prayed their silent prayers and the moon, spying from above, hid behind a cloud. The men stood to attention. A night wind crept down from the Black Mountain and rustled

through the wreaths. The older man barked an order. They both raised revolvers towards the sky and three volleys of shots crashed over the grave.

The young man was tense, a little pale. The man with the cap breathed freely. He pocketed his weapon. The young man shoved his into the waistband of his jeans. They moved off quickly. The moon slid from behind the clouds, the wind shook itself and swept across the landscape. All was quiet once more. The two men, moving across the fields, reached the Falls Road. They walked slowly; they didn't seem to be in any hurry. Few people noticed them as they walked up the Whiterock Road. It was five past twelve. Jim's Cafe was closed. An occasional young couple, hurrying home, clung their way past McCrory Park. A car coming out of Whiterock Drive stopped to let the two men cross its path. As they did so the cemetery wall was caught in the car's headlights.

The white graffitied "IS THERE A LIFE BEFORE DEATH?" flashed as the vehicle swung on to the main road and headed off towards Ballymurphy.

The two men paused and looked at each other. Then they, too, continued on their journey.

where—that same cheese my mother would force me to eat though I could never see that it had any taste. We went up to their room, Butros, Talal and I. They were eating.

—Why don't you taste the wine?

—I'm waiting for you, Father Marcel answered me. We're going to celebrate together with this wine. We went back down the stairs. Father Marcel was aghast; he trembled with dismay and grief.

—What's all this? What is it? This is a barbaric war.

—All wars are like this, Father. It's nothing.

—No, no. Not all wars are like this. I've been in a war too. I was an officer in the French army during the First World War. That war wasn't like this. We respected places of worship and we didn't harm civilians.

—But this is a civil war. It's the civilians who're fighting.

We were walking side by side. Father Marcel bending silently, fearfully, over the statues strewn on the ground. Picking up bits of debris, muttering words I couldn't make out, prayers, or curses, or a mixture of both. Look, Father Marcel said. The church is a ship. Look at the architecture: a church is built like a ship. The church is a ship floating above the world. It is in the world but not of it. I'm not sad. This is a barbaric war, and the winds are blowing against our ship and it has been wrecked. But we'll rebuild it.

—I'm afraid the ship might sink, Father, Butros said maliciously.

—No, no. The ship can't sink in the world. It is in it and not of it. It might be wrecked, that's possible. But it can't sink.

I turned to Father Marcel and saw his face extend across the surface of his white hair as he beheld the shipwreck and its sorrows. This is a man full of memories. These last few moments of his have become memories. Poor Father Marcel.

—But Father, this religious concept about the

THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS SPENT
50 YEARS (!) USING PARLIAMENTARY AND
NON-VIOLENT TACTICS TO TRY TO CHANGE
SOUTH AFRICA'S RACIST LAWS BEFORE RE-
GRETFULLY TURNING TO GUERRILLA WAR IN
1962. THOSE WHO SAY THAT VIOLENCE ONLY
BEGETS VIOLENCE SHOULD TAKE NOTE OF
THE FRUITS OF THEIR STRUGGLE: AN INCRED-
IBLY PEACEFUL TRANSITION TO MAJORITY
RULE IN 1994, FOLLOWED BY A VOLUNTARY
NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT!

SIPHO SEPAMLA
FROM "A RIDE ON THE WHIRLWIND"

The car rolled out of the yard. Uncle Ribs waved a feeble hand at the moving machine as it backed out of his yard. For him the tension began at that very moment. The cool of the night air, the shine of the sparkling stars above left him cold. Not even the brightness of the evening star jutting into the eye as if suspended below the galaxy of the countless other stars above could soften the tight grip of the tension which made Uncle Ribs feel weighted down by the gravity of the mission of his two younger colleagues. He had to seek the comfort of the wall and the door-frame to enter the house and escape the oppressiveness of moments outside the house. But how to break the tension worried him. For Uncle Ribs became then a very, very worried man.

He went straight to his bedroom, perched on the edge of the bed and switched on the portable radio standing on Sis Joyce's dressing table. The crash of the music steadied his nerve. The waves of music were carried to the four walls and echoed into his ears. This became a kind of solace, a wish for an eternity which would bring nothing but this dreamy air of classical music, ethereal and sublime. He resolved to wait for the news, to wait for an announcement he feared to contain in his heart.

Meantime the little car whined up the road leading to deep Soweto. Unlike the previous car, it gave no hint of choking and stopping. It glided smoothly in the night air as if impelled by the silence of the two young men. Each was his own voice and ears. For Mzi the ruins echoed the sound of the moving car; they were so imprinted in his mind's eye, it looked as if they were being carried along to form part of the ruins he already saw huddled under the sky where stood the Jabavu Police Station. Mandla was fascinated by the power of the

THE CIVIL WAR IN LEBANON QUICKLY
BECAME INTERNATIONAL. ON ONE SIDE,
THE PHALANGISTS (LEBANESE CHRISTIAN
MILITAMEN) WERE BACKED UP BY ISRAELI
AND AMERICAN TROOPS. ON THE OTHER SIDE,
THE JOINT FORCES (A COALITION OF LEFTIST,
NATIONALIST, AND ISLAMIC GROUPS) FOUGHT
ALONGSIDE THE PLO. ELIAS KHOURY FOUGHT
IN THE JOINT FORCES AND BASED THIS
STORY ON HIS EXPERIENCES.

ELIAS KHOURY
FROM "LITTLE MOUNTAIN"

The two Capuchins are still here. Father Marcel, about 80, and his companion whose name I couldn't remember and whose age I couldn't tell, for old age seeped through his fingers like water. They stayed in their room above the church, not mixing with the comrades. I knew that they viewed us with extreme suspicion and alarm. We doubted their motives for staying and they feared us and our intentions. That's why I was surprised when the commander asked me to go out and buy them some food—milk, cheese, canned things, meat, coffee. . . . I went, bought the stuff, and on my way back got hold of a bottle of French wine through a friend. I told myself we'd celebrate with the two priests. They were delighted with the present but objected to the cheese.

—We want French cheese.

—That's not possible, Father. All the shops are closed or ransacked. I nevertheless went and bought them some vile French cheese which used to be sold every-

wheel in his hands. It became the power with which the station would be crumbled. In his heart was also a mixed feeling of this joy and the consequences of a mishap. The fear of cops was in him, ingrained by a habit he couldn't easily erase.

Presently Mandela pulled up against one of the houses standing on the street running behind the police station. There was a long row of houses all fenced in in one way or another. He stopped in front of a middle-sized hedge. But the car straddled across two yards where he finally parked. Any casual observer might have puzzled hard about where the occupant of the car might have gone — which of the houses he might be visiting.

They scuttled across the street but slowed to a walking pace on the stubby grass leading to the back wall of the station. Mzi defied the night by fixing his eyes straight ahead. The suitcase was in one hand; the other hand swung freely underneath a hunched shoulder. The military cap was drawn deep over his eyes, giving him a thug's appearance. Mandela tried hard to keep pace with the long strides of his over-confident mate. He had fears of someone watching every movement they made. To ease his own suspicions of the night, he cast his eye hither and thither. This meant he lagged behind and would then hurry to catch up with Mzi.

At the end of the wall Mzi stood suddenly. Car lights blazed on the dark road in front of the station. Both Mzi and Mandela held their breath. It could be a police car or a kwela-kwela. The lights kept an unchanging rate of velocity and soon the car went past in a roar.

Mzi peeped round at the gate: it was wide open and unattended. Good luck! He breathed out and without warning Mandela he stepped onto the beam of light that turned the darkness around the police station into day. It was as if someone jolted his head backward as the light hit his eyes. He chose a shadowy path as soon as he could. It led to a lone kwela-kwela. Mzi nestled in the shade of the vehicle, unhappily. Two things unsettled him: a door at the back of the station building, and the dash he would have to make to the parking bay in the courtyard. For once there he would be lost to the surroundings. There were a number of police vehicles parked in it, with a sprinkle of unclaimed stolen cars. The place looked a metallic jungle in which one could easily take cover.

He made it. As if to show his self-confidence, Mzi pulled up the military cap and felt the night air play around his eyes. It was a relief, short-lived as it was. He was looking at that back door when Mandela joined him. The latter's relief could be seen by the way he sighed, holding a hand on his stomach. The dash for him was tiring.

'I don't like that door,' said Mzi pointing at the offending door, 'it increases the danger points.'

'We will storm and burn this building if you don't release Kawala, if you don't stop killing our people!'

'You are proposing violence!' cried O'Flaherty.

'Yes! We propose and you do it.'

'Kawala! Kawala! No more white dogs in Africa! Africa! Africa!' the crowd shouted. It surged towards Thomson. Thomson retreated backwards to behind the police lines.

'We have not come with guns. We have not come for war!' cried Santasa.

'If you don't want your black brothers to catch the bullet between their teeth, move!'

'We will not move!'

More trucks ploughed into the crowd. The crowd moved forward.

O'Flaherty cried, 'Charge!'

When it was all over at least a hundred people had been injured badly. Ten had been shot in the legs and one fatally. O'Flaherty felt happy with the success of the riot-control drills which he had introduced into the force recently. For him, the casualty figures had not been excessive.

That night a shaken Norris called a press conference. He described the demonstration as 'murderous savagery, performed in full view of the so-called authorities, an attempted coup against parliament by the primitive prince of darkness, aided and abetted by the Colonial Government.' He called upon the Governor to declare a call-up of all able-bodied Europeans, 'arm them with the Government's guns, they too have a right to be protected by the gun of the Government. We cannot trust our security in the hands of black policemen any longer.'

'BAKER COLONIAL BUTCHER WORSE THAN SMITH'. But raised above them all and emblazoned in large deep letters were at least a hundred posters calling for immediate release of Kawala from illegal imprisonment and vowing the war would go on. One or two denounced Mpengula but it was obvious he and his party did not rate much.

An armed black policeman came forward.

'You murderers, what do you want?'

'We want to see your chief dog, Thomson. Aliko Kawala should be released, now!' Mama PALP, the fat leader of the Women's Brigade, and member of the central committee came forward. She had a round moon face, clear brown eyes and for all her troubles appeared to carry her fifty years very well.

'Yes, you are a puppy. Thomson is the dog, the hyena. It is he who has murdered our people with his stupid Governor and Norris. Let them all come out here if they are men!' cried Mama PALP.

'We are under orders to shoot you if you persist!' cried the policeman.

'Shoot us!' said Mama PALP jumping back to the front again.

'Shoot all those wombs here that brought a disease like you into the world. Shoot!'

The policeman looked behind him. He looked at the thousands of men, women and children. All their eyes converged on him. Just then reinforcements arrived. Inside Parliament Norris interrupted his speech to ask the Speaker if, on a point of order, it was right for the debate to continue under conditions of 'savage siege'. He also asked why the forces of law and order were not there to protect the freedom of Parliament.

Thomson stood up. Outside, the deafening cry, 'Release Kawala! We want Thomson! Castrate Thomson! Kill Baker! Skin Norris alive!' could be heard.

When he had sat down in his parliamentary office, Norris rang the Governor and then said to O'Flaherty:

'Tell them, I can speak only to their leaders.'

When the message was broadcast there was a pandemonium:

'No! To all of us or to none! PALP, PALP, PALP, PALP! Kawala! Kawala! Kawala!'

The crowd surged forward towards the police. O'Flaherty could see it coming. It would be another massacre. Even he was getting disgusted. He was feeling like vomiting: If they didn't stop he would have to give the order. O God! O God!

Just then Thomson came out on to the porch. He stood urbanely before the menacing crowd. There was silence. Then Santasa cried:

Mandla was still holding the paper bag. He put it down as he said: 'I would have thought it is God-given. A bomb planted there would increase our chances of success. Don't you think so? And if I'm not wrong, there is a table near that door inside. There's always a cop perched at that table doing homework.'

'I'm not worried about the end part of this game. I can't take chances near a door which can open any moment. There's no cover near that damned door. Can you see that?'

'What about using that lone vehicle near the wall? Plant something in it and blast the wall and all the bloody dogs near it.'

'Plant a bomb in it, you say?'

'Ya, why not? We want the blood of that arse-licker, Batata. Miss him, you get another cop. What's the difference?'

'Indeed, what's the difference,' echoed Mzi. 'I like your idea. I can work up something good, something powerful, a thing which can blow the kwela-kwela to high heaven and the force of the device will blast a hole as huge as a grave. See the bastards tumble, see them buried underneath the rubble. Gots! It's a brilliant idea you have just given me. You'll cover me all the time. That means I won't be working feverishly. I'll be relaxed. I'll know that you'll blast any motherfucker coming our way... Gots! It is a bright idea!'

'I must say carrying the AK47 like this knocks me out. The feeling of it is an experience all its own.'

Mzi never let up in his movements. The hands were all the time joining little wires and the teeth cutting off or tightening something. But he said: 'Come, we'll lose time. Shut up and keep watch while I fix the goodies.'

The night was quiet save for a car or so passing hurriedly on the road nearby. There was now a slight chill in the winter air. Mzi was squatting on the ground working methodically with the device. Mandla nestled against the body of a car which had apparently stood unused for a long time. It was an old Valiant stripped of its chrome and doors half-closed. Then it happened: the back door opened slowly. Mandla's muscles tensed and he gripped tight the AK47 in his hands. He was ready to blast away. Mzi felt rather than saw the change of mood of his colleague. He was about to say something when Mandla pressed a finger on his own lips to shasha him to dead silence. When Mzi eased himself so that he could come upright, Mandla pressed his right shoulder down with his own right hand. At the same time he nudged him with his right knee. Mandla's heart was now racing, his hands were sweating in the cold air. Mzi remained squatting, a little bemused. For him such moments unmasked the drama of a mission. He had turned to watch the face of his colleague for any give-away signs. But Mandla remained rooted at his place,

his eyes glued on the two cops emerging from the door.

The cops were in a carefree mood. One carried a file. Now and then it was flying in the air as the man gesticulated in the course of the conversation with his colleague. The two headed for the kwelakwela car-marked for the mission by Mzi and Mandla. Mandla's heart dropped to his knees. He raised the automatic rifle instinctively. Mzi watched this movement with disbelief. 'What's the matter?' he asked.

'The bloody swines are going to take the van.'

'Damn fools!' coughed Mzi. He fidgeted on the ground but said: 'Don't do any silly thing either. Change course, that's all it means.' After a short pause Mzi enquired: 'Are the bastards moving or what, I'm tired squatting like this.' It was obvious the tension of the moment ate into the patience of both young men.

Mandla, his grip still tight, his hands clammy, mumbled an answer.

The van roared and went on to screech out of the police station.

Inside the charge-office Sergeant James Ntloko, the man in charge, complained to no-one in particular: 'One of these days, those men are going to break their necks. Why can't they drive out quietly? Why this roar and screech, as if the devil is behind them? Ag! Man!' The Sergeant tucked his head over a pack of cards at the far end of the counter. Two things seemed to satisfy the ageing cop in the police force: playing spoof alone, and drawing smoke from a long cigarette. He was not one of those smokers who cherish clipping the stub of a cigarette. One quarter of the way through a new cigarette, the Sarge would discard it for a fresh one. 'I am no prisoner,' he boasted about this habit.

At the other end of the counter stood Constable Mpedi. Tall, healthy and charming. His shoulders were always sagging as if he was bored by his surroundings. He made up for this bored look and lethargic movement of his body by being pretty likeable. Now he stood near a couple seated on a bench against the wall. It was clear not all was well between the two and Mpedi was the peace-maker. First the woman and then the man stood up. The woman began to move to the exit door. Her man followed, engaged in a tittle-tattle with Mpedi.

Warrant Officer Batata buried his head in some paper work on the table near the back door. For him there was no world other than his own; there were no people around except himself. His expression was a mask of concentration and disdain. He was scribbling copious notes on sheaves of paper. Batata didn't raise his head as the quarrelling couple left the police station. Always self-confident, always an authority, he spoke to the paper-work before him: 'Mpedi! Mpedi!' Constable Mpedi, alert and obedient, answered: 'Coming, Sir!'

life. In the Legislative Council a hasty marathon debate on the situation opened that day at 4.30 p.m. The debate continued into the early hours of the morning. The chamber was stiffly guarded. Norris had defied the Governor's orders and brought his own armed volunteers to stand guard. At all other times that would have been treason. It would have been equivalent to a coup. But vexed, tormented and harassed from all corners and including Mpengula who called for the public hanging of Kawala and his men, that was no time for legalities.

'We will arm ourselves. We have armed ourselves!' cried Norris, raising his arm and thumping the air. 'Katenga and his murder incorporated are still at large, at large to stalk our homes with the plague of a most chilling murder. When Rome gave up its duty to defend the empire, life itself, that is when Rome decayed and died. How can a Kaffir...'

There was an interruption. Someone on the official benches said: 'On a point of order.'

The Speaker stood up.

'A point of order has been raised,' he said.

'Is it in order for the Hon. Member for Musasa West to refer to Africans as Kaffirs?'

The Speaker looked furtively at the Government member who had raised the question. He too was angry with the blacks and could you blame him for it? He paused uncertainly and then said:

'The Hon. Member for Musasa West may continue. The point of order was not a point of substance. People will be people by whatever you call them. Hon. Member for Musasa West.'

Sir Ray looked at the member who had queried him. He could have gobbled him up.

'Playing on, at, with words, that's all these people,' his massive hands spread at the Government members, 'are doing when Musasa burns, people die the most horrible mangled deaths. We, Mr Speaker...'

There was a commotion outside. A home guard was scuffling with someone. The Sergeant-at-arms brought the Speaker a note. There was a massive black demonstration outside. Santasa and Mama PALP were leading it. The long column of men, women and children was spewing into Parliament Square. The home guard stood at the ready, their guns pointed towards it.

'We want to see Thomson, now!' cried Santasa.

'We want Thomson! We want Thomson!' chanted the crowd.

Posters read 'NORRIS A MURDERER', 'BGS MAFIA CAPITALIST CLIQUE', 'AWAY WITH IDIOT BAKER',

'Thanks Janet.' He left.

A faint clock-like sound ticked away in the brown bag under the driver's seat in the Mercedes Benz in the parking lot. Sir Basil headed for the Benz. At that moment Janet ran towards him. He heard her heels and turned round. Janet whispered something into his ears, something perhaps about the call to his wife. It was 2.39 p.m.

Sir Basil looked at his watch again. He had to hurry. The minute hand was just touching 2.39 1/2. He opened the door slid the key in, waved to Janet, turned the ignition and — bang! The car lifted up in a huge explosion which sent glass and splinters flying right into the bank itself. Sir Basil, Janet and three white customers in the bank were dead....

It was 2.40 p.m. Something ticked away in the brown parcel in the air vent up on the eighth floor of Bristol House. John Turnbull had just left a minute before for a crisis meeting with the Governor. Lepton who had come in for the day to finalize all the flow sheets in respect of the company's application for financing from Exim-bank was sitting at his desk. For the black staff, all of whom were only labourers, that afternoon was their time off. Once a week they got an afternoon off. Lepton had just stood up, having heard something like an explosion downtown and was looking through the window when the whole building trembled, something lifted and there was a deafening explosion which showered debris for a quarter of a mile around. When Lepton ran down to the ground floor and then outside, he found that the eighth floor was hanging together by a string and people were lying all over, dead....

At the Musasa supermarket dead bodies and dummies were lying higgledy-piggledy among the debris of bricks and mortar. A fire engine was rushing towards the smouldering building....

The Musasa Safari Club had been reduced to a shell of smouldering charred bodies. It had taken the worst....

At 2.40 p.m. also a worker from the Musasa supermarket warehouse sat at a table with two boys about his age at the Sanga African Bar. They were having a beer and laughing away.

At that same time the worker who had polished up the Mercedes Benz in the parking lot at the bank stood at his stall hawking fresh fish. The man's stall was next to Mrs Kawala's. He looked at her and smiled broadly. Normally his wife attended to the stall, but to-day he had come to help her out. He only did this on Saturday mornings now and again.

That day there was hell to pay for Jefferson and O'Flaherty. The little Governor was angry, really angry for the first time ever in his

Batata said rather officiously: 'Bring me yesterday's Entry Book.' Mpedi didn't say anything. He stepped in the direction of some office away from the main charge-office. In his silence entered his dislike for the mean Warrant Officer. He didn't like the way Batata ordered him around as if he, Mpedi, was a small boy. But, thought Mpedi to himself, Batata likes to show off at the expense of other people. He was a bully. All the same, he would have to find him the Entry Book. Otherwise Batata would be screaming his top off and upset the Sarge. Now that was a sweet ol' man for you. Working the night-shift with him was a relief — always. Never bothers one, never pushes one around. Give him a cup of black coffee every two hours and he'll go on playing his cards and smoking a thin cigarette between two thick, clumsy fingers: a darling of an ol' man, observed Mpedi, standing in front of shelves in one of the rooms in the police station. He was going through a pile of note-books already filed on the shelves.

The grinding of rail-tracks grated the silence of the winter night. It was a late Naledi train heading for nearby Nhlazana Station.

'All clear,' said Mandla. His voice seemed to choke. His own tension had been mounting while Mzi made final touches to the gadget at his feet. For Mandla heard the tick-tick loud and clear and knew the meaning of it all.

'We'll have to leave the thing by the back door and hope for the best. There's no time to debate situations,' grouched Mzi. His own patience was wearing thin.

'I guess you are right,' said Mandla. The tick-tick at his feet added anxious moments to his duty as guard. Even his boyish pleasure in holding an automatic rifle in his hands couldn't erase this fear of the night in the courtyard of a police station. He was in a state, perspiring where he should have shivered.

'Ready?'

'Aha!'

'We have two minutes to clear off this ground. That's long enough to say one's prayer but by God I don't want to see what's going to happen to this building and the bloody cops in it.'

'I pray Batata is in,' snarled Mandla in a croaking voice.

'And may his lips be clamped before he prays,' jeered Mzi.

Warrant Officer Batata rose from his seat, his face creased by some tension. Constable Mpedi remained closeted in the records room and Sergeant Ntloko pored over the cards before him. Batata went up to the exit-door and stood on the threshold scanning what he could see of the night.

None of the cops could tell how it happened: the blast hit the police station so suddenly and thunderingly, it rocked every one of

them one way or another. It was heard miles away. The force flung Sergeant Ntloko up and across the room. He landed on his huge stomach, prostrate, pinned against what remained of the wall near the front door of the station. Constable Mpedi perched on his bum in the records room, petrified, his hands clasped in the air where the Entry Book should have been. Mpedi was terrified to find himself in a cloud of dust and debris whirling and whirling as if his own head were in a spin.

Batata was the lucky one. He was swept off his feet by a force he could hardly explain minutes later; it landed him on the soft lawn in the foreground of the station yard. Brave man that he was, he waited thoughts were for the safety of the others. He was attracted by the cries and groans of Sergeant Ntloko. The man cried: 'I am finished! I am finished!' Ntloko was swimming in a pool of dust, pinned down by an assortment of things: wood, plaster, iron and bricks. His voice grew faint as moments ticked by but he kept up a chorus of: 'Help me God! Help me people! I am finished! Oh! Oh! I am finished.'

It was difficult for Batata to reach his colleague. The place was in darkness due to power failure; the place was in shambles. Batata scratched and cleared until his hand touched the limp hand of his once Jabavu Police Station. Constable Mpedi was rescued and rushed to Bara.

By this time crowds of bystanders, curious, affected and some detached, stood watching the frenzied goings-on at the bombed police station. There were countless volunteers lending a hand at this dark hour of the law. For such is the strangeness of humanity.

Mzi and Mandela were nowhere in sight. Mandela gripped the steering wheel with the power of a conqueror. He was almost singing with the sense of failure enveloping his being. For Mzi there was a knowing sense told him the blast wasn't what he wanted it to be. The reverberations were not of a pitch he wanted to hear. Something bigger was what he had hoped for. But from the moment the placing of the bomb had become a matter of chance, he knew he had failed. He resolved to work diligently for the success of his original mission. That gave him comfort. He sat back in the car with his eyes shut. It was as if he wanted to hide away from the ruins they would pass, reminding him of the ruins he had left behind.

Soweto went to sleep that night unaware of the nightmare to which it had given rise. It was a nightmare which would linger for many, many nights to follow.

The radio news items of the night made no mention of this important event — not yet!

in the dining room of the Musasa Safari Club, a prestigious joint mainly for rich tourists from Europe and the United States. A tall, grey-haired waiter carried a tray to the back of the room. He looked around. The other waiters were busy with final orders. He looked tray down slowly then again looked around. He uncovered it and removed a package from it and, bending to pick up a pencil, he set the package on the floor. Gently with his foot he helped it on to a position under the counter. He looked around, pretended that he had forgotten something and walked away.

A client called 'Hey you.' The waiter stopped. His mouth dry. He turned. The man beckoned him. He came. His heart beating hard. 'Get us a bit of butter,' said the client. The waiter walked over to the counter where he had planted the bomb. The butter was there. He brought it to the Bwana and walked away to the kitchen. The kitchen was empty with everyone still in the dining room madly serving out as the kitchen had to close by 2.30 p.m. The waiter walked into an alley in the back of the Safari Club. The alley was empty. He looked around, slipped off his waiter's jacket and stuffed it into a garbage tin, rolled up the sleeves of his shirt, walked into the street and melted away with the crowds.

Barclays Bank Kandaha was crowded and busy. It opened for the afternoon service once a week. It was busy because of the panic caused by the various acts of violence that had happened. Already an Angola-type of white exodus was being freely discussed. Already to the general manager's office opened. He was a tall thin man with a razor-cut moustache, grey suit and greying hair. A bit of a dandy you might have called Sir Basil, especially with the brown alligator attaché case dangling off his well-manicured hand. He looked at his gold Omega Sea Master watch. It read 2.30 p.m. He cursed under his breath. He had worked over the lunch hour and his wife was still waiting for him at home. If there was one thing she always insisted on it was that Sir Basil should never pass up his lunch. And if he was lunching out she checked that this was indeed so. And when he returned she would ask who was at the lunch, just so she could be certain he had eaten.

He stopped briefly at his secretary's desk — a young girl of around twenty, pretty with jet black long hair hanging down to her waist. That was the kind of woman that turned Sir Basil on and maybe in a platonic kind of way, that is why he got on so well with her. 'Please call my wife and tell her I'm on my way.'

'Yes, Sir Basil,' replied Janet. Janet picked up the phone as Sir Basil walked away. Then she stopped and called 'Sir Basil... Sir Basil turned around. She said 'Sir Basil...'

crisp morning air. The man lit it and ran to safety. Then there was a sudden tremble and like a fire cracker the dynamite exploded. The train jumped up sky-high like a long horizontal snake rocket reaching for the sky. Katenga watched with calm as the train and bridge came down with a screech, explosion and great metallic noise, plunged down, some of it into the cold waters of the river. Whole beams hurtled into the bush showering it with splinters of metal rock. Ten minutes later all was quiet except for trapped bodies wailing and crying. The day after they learned that help came too late and that there had been no survivors.

'And now,' said Katenga, 'for the bastard's soft belly - the city.' Saying which both Katenga and Chimuko looked at their watches and smiled with a grimace. If Santasa had not let down his side of the plan there would be action in the city soon.

It was 2.15 p.m. of the same day. At Bristol House, Musasa a black worker in denim overalls slid into the air vent. He picked up a mop and pail and scaled up to the exit on the eighth floor....

In the warehouse of the Musasa supermarket an industrious workman tidied around the place. The warehouse manager had just left the large room to go upstairs to chat up the general manager about the latest event - the blowing up of the train on the border. Of course such events were terrible. But they could not happen here in Musasa. The black man valued his job and he knew that that meant the white man being around. The worker in the warehouse looked around. It was 2.15 p.m. There was no one watching. No one except a mischievously nude white doll whose eyes always seemed to trail him from whatever point he looked at it. But it was only a doll. He had in any case spent the morning dusting it up for moving into the supermarket the following morning. He smiled at it briefly and said:

'You and I will be great pals.' The man looked around again. No one there. He slid a brown paper bag behind a stack of boxes, took off his dust coat and walked out on to the crowded street and disappeared....

It was still the same afternoon. A middle-aged African stood polishing up the steel grey Mercedes Benz. The official car of the general manager of Barclays Bank, Kandaha. If anyone had watched him, he would have noticed that the man was uneasy and kept glancing around furtively. The man slid a brown bag under the driver's seat. He gave the car another brush up and melted into the street crowds....

A hundred patrons were just winding up their lunch obsequies

WE HAVE MANY MONUMENTS FOR THE 58,000
AMERICAN DEAD IN VIETNAM, AND COUNTLESS
T-SHIRTS AND FLAGS PLEDGING NEVER TO
FORGET THE ONE OR TWO THOUSAND MISSING
IN ACTION. SHOULDN'T WE ALSO MOURN THE
NEARLY 3 MILLION DEAD AND MISSING
VIETNAMESE? SHOULDN'T WE PAY TRIBUTE
TO THEIR DETERMINATION AND STRENGTH
IN THE LONG STRUGGLE TO FREE THEIR
COUNTRY FROM FOREIGN DOMINATION?!

GOH POH SENG
FROM "THE IMMOLATION"

So many types of people are thrown together by the cause, Thanh reflected. He was glad about that. Made it more universal. And therefore less personal. Was his involvement a personal thing? Was it because of a special selfishness? A special self-indulgence? And what about the others? What really were their motivations in joining, in waiting for this fight that was coming? He looked from one to the other of his companions, but their faces told him nothing. He looked up at the sky. Nothing fathomable there either. Only the clouds had spread out some more; more white; until the sky was like a white sheet of paper, a page. And afterwards, after the bloodshed, would anything be written on that page? Or would there be no tale-telling evidence, nothing to be read by posterity? No, there would be nothing. Only the people involved in the mutual killing would know, if they survived, if they remembered. This battle would not even make it to the footnotes of any future history written about their time.

No one would know. Probably no one would care either, and even supposing they did, it would do no good. Perhaps those alive afterwards would one day tell it to their grandchildren. And that would do no good either. He imagined a battle to be a terrible thing. A terrible thing while it happened. Afterwards, there would only be the scars worn by the survivors. They might display these scars later, to attest to their being at the battle; they might show them to friends at social gatherings, but this would only embarrass their friends, who had no great desire to be shown scars, to be shown ugly things. As for those who don't survive, it won't matter any more. Nothing will matter any more. No more pain. Nothing. They will not miss anything. It might be the better deal.

Was that true? Was he that cynical about life? Would he miss nothing?

He knew the answer. He would miss many things. He would miss My, Quang Tuyen, friendship, sunsets, morning walks, playing with children, the wind sousing through the trees. He would miss that. Yes, he would miss many things. He would miss everything. Lately, he had been happy.

A fine sweat formed on his brow. He raised himself slightly and peered at the road. Nothing there. There had not been any traffic passing along the highway since they took up their positions. The empty road seemed to be waiting for traffic, seemed hospitable.

Would that supply convoy arrive on time? What if the intelligence was unreliable and incorrect? Or if there had been a sudden change of plans by the enemy? His reaction to this notion was mixed. He wanted the convoy to come, and he dreaded its coming. But it would come. He felt sure.

The battle plans were well formulated. He went over them in his mind. First, they were to allow the convoy to pass; it was estimated to consist of about twenty vehicles, guarded by government soldiers, with perhaps some Americans. Let them roll through, until all of them passed the first flank of the ambush position. By about that time the lead vehicles would have set off the mines which had been carefully planted along that particular stretch of road: this task had been done earlier that morning. This

NORTHERN RHODESIA ATTAINED INDEPENDENCE
IN 1964, CHANGING ITS NAME TO ZAMBIA.
SOUTHERN RHODESIA HAD TO FIGHT A MUCH
LONGER AND BLOODIER BATTLE, FINALLY
WINNING INDEPENDENCE IN 1980 AND CHANG-
ING ITS NAME TO ZIMBABWE. IN THIS STORY
"KANDAHA" IS A FICTIONAL ISLAND COUNTRY
IN BETWEEN THE TWO.

DOMINIC MULAISHO
FROM "THE SMOKE THAT THUNDERS"

Katenga looked at his Cuban wrist watch. He had changed plans about storming the police station on the border. Any time within the next thirty minutes the Musasa-bound train would be passing through the pass cut deep into the mountain. It would be laden with merchandise from Rhodesia. That is what kept the white man's wheels of commerce moving in Kandaha. They had practised train blow-ups many times and this was as good as any target to start with. Perhaps the best. After burrowing through the mountain the rail road came on to an open valley and a tributary of the Zambezi flowed below it. That bridge was the best target.

Chimuko and Katenga watched as some ten freedom fighters planted the dynamite on the beams of the bridge. Katenga stood with a rifle and two rows of bullets across his chest. Then he waved the other people off the bridge. He had seen the sky light up further down. That could only have been the train. Ten minutes later the train appeared on the horizon. They all scampered away to hide in the bushes. Katenga grinned broadly as the train came on, seeming as though it was picking up more and more energy. He signalled to one fellow to light the fuse. In that moment he could see a passenger leaning out of the window and perhaps savouring the

wrong is another matter. But they were prepared to risk their lives and all that was dear to them for a common cause that they believed in. How many people of such mettle can you find among the Sinhalese of today?

Professor Amaradasa became pensive. He almost felt as if his wife's remarks were aimed at him. If he found himself in a situation in which he would have to choose between the common good and his own personal interest, what would he do? Would he be prepared to sacrifice himself for the sake of others?

As soon as he got up the next morning he went to the room where the students were sleeping. He wanted to remind them to shave themselves before they did anything else. But he didn't see them there. And the back door was unlocked and left ajar.

would be the signal for the initial wave of attack: the comrades lying hidden on the raised bank would start firing at the whole length of the convoy, using machine guns, rifles and grenades. After a while, it was expected that the enemy soldiers, in order to take cover from the ambush coming from behind the trees and boulders on the high bank, would try to take up positions on the low, flat land. At a given signal, Thanh and the comrades who actually formed the greater part of the ambush party would fire directly into the enemy whose backs would be towards them since they would be concentrating on beating off the attack from their front. Thus the enemy would be taken unawares: they would be exposed and vulnerable. The comrades' orders were to attack briskly and heavily, until the enemy was completely destroyed. Afterwards, they were to raid the convoy and carry off the supplies, said to be arms and medicines meant for government outposts farther along National Route Eleven. These valuable supplies were to be quickly conveyed back to Loc Son. Later, they would be transferred elsewhere. They had been told not to take any prisoners. That meant that they were to kill all the enemy. They were also instructed to leave their own dead behind, and only carry off the wounded. Most of their energy would be needed to cart away the looted supplies. That was to be their first priority.

After he had projected the whole operation on the screen of his mind, for a while it lay fallow: the incessant mechanism accepting a pause. His attention wandered until it turned on his companions, the hulks of whose bodies were ubiquitous in that sudden surround of silence following the ebbing of his thoughts. Their faces wore lugubrious expressions. What lies behind them? he wondered. Are each of us, in our separate ways, thinking of the same thing? Are they at this exact moment, entertaining the same thoughts as I? Our mental processes synchronizing like precise, efficient machines? After all, we face the same future, the same battle ahead, though probably we shall suffer different fates at the end. He scrutinized their faces. Are they thinking of wives, sweethearts left behind somewhere, school days, the cinema, a meal at a particular restaurant, a special tree, a toy personally prized at boy-

hood, parents, making love, a girl once seen on a bus whom they did not get to know, a picnic, a swim on a hot afternoon, how a palm frond swayed, flexed curvily by a stiff breeze, a cup of coffee, a dark cloudy day when they first held the hand of a loved one, starlight blinking in the night, a yellow flower, a son, what, what, what?

His ears picked up the sound of motor engines, like a swarm of metallic bees, and it made his heart quiver. They're coming! He turned to Huu, who returned his look, acknowledging the message, and then to Chau who did likewise. They're coming! Their eyes riveted on the road, they willed their bodies to become invisible, pressing so close as to be part of the earth, pressed-prone against proneness. Thanh surreptitiously reached out to touch his rifle. Hard important thing, extension now of his new organism, of his fear, his self-protectiveness, his muscles, his prowess, armour, fist. Like the others, he lay still, only letting his eyeballs roam, those twin globes that castor in the confines of their sockets without sonorousness trying not to think, as if that might make a sound, make a resonance betraying his whereabouts. He was apprehensive, excitement-shrivelled, small.

The vehicular sound grew perceptibly louder and to the inexperienced Thanh who waited with bated breath, it was like a hand clutching his heart, clutching tighter and tighter as it grew louder and louder. Is this constriction around the heart, fear, and if so, does this fright make me a coward? he wondered. Then the first truck came into view: a dark green, massive object, like a monster, the front lights cupped with wire netting were eyes, the front grill, teeth, and the large black tyres, superbly superior instruments of locomotion. It rumbled angrily past, followed by many others. So many! Surely they were not going to pit themselves against these monsters with their cargos of soldiers armed to the teeth? He was only shielded by the frail blades of grass. Thanh was thinking that the ambush would not come off, and also that the lead vehicle was so far ahead it must have passed the mines. He was trying to remember exactly where the latter were planted, scanning the scene for landmarks. Was it by that tall tree there, the one that was mostly trunk with leaves only at the topmost reaches?

We will learn from the mistakes we have made, and go forward.'

Hardly had half an hour gone when Sushcela laid a meal of rice on the table, with dhal curry, fried fish and *sambol*.

She saw Munasinha eat with his left hand, and looked at her husband in surprise.

'You seem to have cultivated new habits, Munasinha,' said the professor jocularly, making a gesture to indicate what he meant.

Munasinha continued eating, keeping his head bent over his plate.

'Show it, then,' said Wijesiri.

Munasinha raised his right hand which he had kept all the while tucked under his sarong at the waist, and they noticed that it ended in a stump at the wrist.

'A hand-bomb!'

With his smile still on his face he went on eating silently.

'I'll tell you what you ought to do,' said the professor after a while. 'You stay here for a day or two. Shave off those beards of yours, or the police will suspect you. We'll think of some solution by and by.'

'In any case, we intended to stay with you tonight.'

'You have no other alternative, of course.'

The professor showed the students to the visitors' room where Sushcela had prepared two beds for them, then himself retired. He stayed awake a long time, talking to his wife.

'My head reeled when I saw what had happened to Munasinha's hand,' said Sushcela. 'Poor boy! That it should have happened to a handsome young man like him! Whatever you may think of them, they are a courageous lot. Sincere in their motives, at least.'

'What's the use of calling them courageous or sincere? It would be more correct to say they were misguided.'

'That's not the point. Whether they were right or

Suddenly they saw Susheela standing in the half-light and gaping at them as if she had seen ghosts.

'Heavens! It's you! I could hardly believe my eyes. Why didn't you tell me they were here?' she asked her husband. 'What a fright I was in! I could hear whispering going on and on, and no lights.... With you, too, not in bed.'

The professor hushed her into silence.

'Actually I was on the point of pulling you out of bed to ask you whether you can give these chaps something to eat.'

'What would you like to eat? Bread or rice? There's no rice ready, but I can put some on the fire. It'll take some time.'

'There's nothing like rice, really,' said Wijesiri putting on a sly smile and rubbing his stomach with the palm of his hand. 'I can't remember when I last had a square meal of rice and curry.'

Susheela liked Wijesiri for his homely ways.

'Wijesiri hasn't changed a bit,' she remarked, walking away towards the kitchen.

'Don't put on the lights,' the professor called out to her. 'There are some candles in the top drawer of the chest of drawers.'

Then he turned to his two students.

'The best advice I can give you now is to take advantage of the amnesty offered by the prime minister and turn yourselves in at the nearest police station. Otherwise they'll track you down and arrest you or shoot you somewhere.'

The two young men smiled.

'Our struggle is not over, Sir,' said Munasinha. 'How can we betray our boys?'

'But can't you see that you have failed? And you admit it yourselves. There has been enough carnage already. Do you want to have any more?'

'We are ready to die. Our struggle has only started. It may be that our strategy has been wrong so far.

Yes, it must have gone by, and the mines had failed to work.

The sudden explosion shook him, as a mine went off, and smaller explosions followed in its wake like echoes, and then the flash of fire and the black smoke mushrooming. The lead truck was crippled. After an arrested second, he heard frail human cries, and saw some soldiers leaping out of the back of the stricken truck. Another explosion took place as the petrol tank ignited, and black smoke billowed above the red fire. The sound of gunfire crackled as the ambush party opposite opened fire along the whole length of the road. The other trucks had ground to a halt, but a moment later the truck just behind the damaged one tried to swerve by to escape; a few metres farther up the road it hit another mine and exploded. More soldiers now jumped out of the trucks, and tried, once on their feet, to shoot back at their unseen ambushers. Thanh saw several soldiers fall, some crying out in pain, some silently. Those who escaped retreated to the open flat ground. They threw themselves down and began to shoot back at the ambushers on the opposite bank. To the left where the last trucks were now abandoned on the road, comrades emerged from their hiding place to attack the soldiers, driving them farther back onto the flat ground. This was the signal for the ambush party on his side to attack: all at once machine guns and rifles opened up from behind on the hapless enemy soldiers. After a few seconds' hesitation, Thanh himself began to shoot, although he could not single out any specific enemy soldier to aim at. He simply fired ahead. Someone then gave the call to advance and attack. The comrades rose up and rushed at the enemy, firing as they ran. Thanh saw Tho and his party getting up and running to the front. He rose together with Huu and Chau and rushed forward. The air was filled with the sound of shooting and battle cries and the cries of the wounded. He could smell smoke and burning and firearms, and his rifle was no longer only a rifle but something attached to his trigger finger which squeezed and squeezed. Sometime later, he made out the enemy and tried to aim at one, but his mind was a helter-skelter. He was about ten metres behind Tho who, camouflaged with leaves and small branches

stuck all over his body, looked quite comical. Suddenly he saw Tho dropping his rifle, and making a strange movement, bringing his two hands forward to clutch his throat as he fell to the ground. Thanh went up to his friend, who lay face down, body straight and columnar. He turned Tho over. He had been shot in the throat and blood was trickling out between the fingers which were trying to plug the wound. Tho's face contorted as through he was going to scream, a choked, soundless scream, through the weak oval of his mouth. His eyes were aglint with bewilderment and pain. Finally his hands fell limply, hopelessly away. His eyes were suddenly glassy, unseeing but staring straight ahead. Thanh knew his friend was dead. He was numb with disbelief, but aghast at the certainty: Tho was dead. With his own frantic knowledge of this, everything else grew distant, faint and unreal. The fighting was still going on, but it had nothing to do with this body that was lying before him, and this thing that was going on inexpressively within him.

Just then, Chau ran back to Thanh and nudged him hard. Thanh looked up at his comrade. Slowly he got up onto his feet, and followed Chau. They were nearing the enemy. The enemy, the enemy, the enemy. Tho is dead. The enemy, the enemy. Shooting. Thanh was shooting. This time looking for the enemy to shoot at. He fired shots at the prostrate figures of some enemy soldiers. They were already dead, but he shot at them all the same. Sensing a movement to his right, he turned and advanced. When he came to the spot, he saw a wounded soldier, a young man half on his feet gripping his belly which was wet with recent blood. Their eyes met, and the next moment Thanh shot the young man in the forehead just as he tried to talk to him, and in that split second Thanh wanted to stay his trigger finger, stay it, stay it, but it was too late. The shot rang out, and in the pale tender plain of flesh above those speaking eyes, a patch burst into redness, a red flowering. Thanh could still hear the awful thudding sound as the bullet cracked the young man's cranium and lodged initially in the soft bed of the brain, and the body slumped laterally onto the grassy plain. Thanh still tried to stay his culprit finger, but the task was done. It could not be undone.

Obviously Wijesiri was not going to waste any sympathy on Nandasena.

'Well, tell us your story,' said the professor.

'We had to retreat in the end, of course. The police seemed to have got information well in time, and they were ready for us. They shot at us from the *bo* tree in front of the station. But there weren't more than ten or twelve policemen altogether. There were several hundred of us, from Konduruwewa, Diya-beduma, Elahera and Bakamoona. There was also a contingent from Minneriya and another from Giritale who had merged into a single unit before advancing on Polonnaruwa. But the police had machine guns, and our boys had only rifles and hand-bombs. Anyway we could have overpowered them if the army hadn't come.'

Munasinha sounded a more despondent note, however.

'It was a miserable failure, Sir,' he said. 'Our chaps hardly know how to hold a gun. And we were not aware that it had been planned to attack Polonnaruwa that night. There was a difference of opinion about it. We had suggested that the whole thing be postponed, after Wijeweera was arrested. And we were told that Wijeweera himself was not in favour of our beginning the revolt just then. Everything got confused, our communications broke down, and Moneragala was attacked on the fourth as a result of a wrong order.... Of course, our chaps didn't give up. But the army came and we were being shot at from all sides. So we thought it better to escape rather than just become gun fodder. We fled along the lake bund before it was light and got to Kalahagala. From there we came through the jungle to Bakamoona.'

'Some fled in the direction of Kaduruwela.'

'How many escaped, altogether?'

'There were hardly more than twenty or thirty left, I think.'

and made it stand upright.

The faces of the two young men were covered with the growth of several weeks. Munasinha could hardly be recognized, so emaciated had he become. But Wijesiri remained his robust self. Both were dressed in sarongs with shirts thrown over them. And their feet were bare.

A beam from a passing car played on them for a while. Then it moved away and got lost in the range of hills. The professor fetched two bulky volumes from his bookcase in the hall and shielded the candle with them.

'Well, my young friends, what have you been up to?' he asked in his best pedagogic manner. 'You put the whole lot of us into a tight squeeze the other day.' They laughed.

'To tell you the truth, Sir, we hadn't the faintest idea that anything was going to happen that day, till we met those chaps near the ruins. So we just had to go along with them.'

'Then why did you carry your uniforms with you?' 'On spec, Sir. We wanted to be ready in case something started.'

'But you shouldn't have joined the trip if that was the situation. You were with so many others who had nothing to do with your rebellion. Do you realize that we escaped by the skin of our teeth? It was just our luck that Weerakoon came at the right moment. If he had been five minutes late we would all have been shot like dogs.'

The professor spoke sternly and the boys held their peace.

'Did you hear what happened to Nandasena?'

'We didn't see Nandasena, Sir. We didn't have much faith in him, anyhow. Where is he now?'

'He was killed, trying to come back to us, probably.' There was a short silence.

'So many others got killed, fighting for us.'

Never, never, never. He looked down at that young face, now faceless in death, the formless, dispersed face of death. It was wearing that shocking red blotch on its forehead. A small well of blood continued to exude.

Elsewhere the bullets were still whining in the hot afternoon. Elsewhere, life went on, dying went on, the inexorable turning of the bloody universe, but he was stunned out of it, set apart by his ghastly deed. He had killed his first man, his brother. His right index finger, that trigger finger, was leaden with what it had performed. Stiff, useless.

The fighting continued starkly before his eyes but he was incapable of performing. He traversed the blood-sodden ground, the grass sleekly wet red, the road surface speckled, dry, darkening red, the corpses lying about like dolls. He walked without intent, until he was ordered sharply to help in the work. The comrades were already unloading the trucks. He helped carry arms, wooden crates and other supplies. Towards late afternoon when their immediate work was almost finished, a wind rose, passing over the earth and the rustling grass, unplundering, unlike the men before its wake.

After about an hour, they began carting their loot back to Loc Son. Thanh carried a heavy crate of arms on his shoulders. The weight sat oppressively on him, a pressure, a burden, a guilt. Strangely, he felt this weight on his shoulders a condition, as if what he had seen and done needed an acceptance. That it was physical did not matter. The weight was an axis about which his world turned.

IN 1971, A MAOIST, MOSTLY STUDENT,
UPRISING SWEEPED SRI LANKA AND NEARLY
SUCCEEDED IN TOPPLING THE GOVERNMENT.
EDIRIWIRA SARACHCHANDRA
FROM "CURFEW AND A FULL MOON"

A FEW DAYS later, soon after Professor Amaradasa had gone to bed, he heard someone knocking on his back-door. It was past eleven and it was hardly five minutes since he had put out the lights of the house. He knew it couldn't be the police or the army who would have sounded more imperious and would, certainly, come to the front of the house. The knock was faint and timid, if knock it was, and he waited a few minutes to see if it would be repeated. And it was, in a few seconds, and this time it was a little louder, although still hesitant. All the fears that had beset him in the past few weeks about the possibility of rebels coming out of their hiding places in the jungle at the back of the house and asking for weapons or food or simply shelter for the night, flowed back into his mind. But even if it were so, he thought, he had to let them in. All at once a flood of warm feelings towards the young rebels, a sense of nearness to them, surged within him. They were the youth he knew so well, soft-hearted and subdued in their manner, whom he could never regard as his enemy. At no time had he feared them or believed them capable of

violence or cruelty. In fact he had felt an abundant sympathy for their cause, although he had never been able to agree with them on the way they proposed to set about reforming society.

Susheela was sleeping by his side and he had to slip out without disturbing her. If she woke up she would get unnecessarily panicky and would certainly prevent him from opening the door.

He got out of bed softly and walked towards the dining room bare-footed so as to make the least possible noise. He switched on the light and looked around him. He would now be in full view of anyone who came in, and this gave him courage by a strange kind of logic: if anyone wanted to kill him he would have to perform murder in cold-blood, and he couldn't think of anyone who would want to do such a thing to him.

He opened the door and looked out. There was no one in sight. A chill went down his spine, and he felt like immediately retreating and locking the door. Just then a voice came from the dark.

'Put the light out, Sir, quickly.'

The tone of the voice gave him some confidence and he complied with the request. The next moment two figures stepped forward out of the shadows. One had a thin lanky frame. The other was stocky and shorter.

'Can't you recognize us, Sir?' came the same voice.

The professor peered and then held his breath. He stepped aside, let Munasinha and Wijesiri enter, and then closed the door behind them.

It became pitch dark inside.

'Wait a minute,' he said, and groping among the furniture, came up to a chest of drawers. He fumbled in one of the drawers and found a candle.

'Anyone got a box of matches?'

Immediately one of the boys struck a match. The professor lit the candle, poured some wax on the table